



Series title: Our Journey of discovery

Session title: Living in the presence

Both the Israelites in the time of Moses and the followers of Jesus lived under oppressive empires: Egyptian and Roman. The Bible teaches us to live as people of kingdom rather than empire. This was Jim's point in a recent talk that I want to build on.

Jesus described the kingdom as like a mustard seed. Small but it grew rapidly and was banned in Israel as a result The Mustard Seed was a subversive plant like Japanese knot weed.

Galatians 5 – Paul lists the fruit of God living in us
But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.
These values are embodied in the person of Jesus.

Paul wrote to people who had been subjected to the Greek empire. They also had nine values.

"Courage, justice, temperance" and "generosity, wit, friendliness, truthfulness, magnificence, and greatness of soul"

Their nine virtues, developed by Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, focussed on greatness. The produce of their values was Alexander the Great. A magnificent conqueror who described himself as the king of kings. He embodied these values. When he died young, maybe poisoned, all his general wanted the top spot so civil war ensued and they wiped each other out and the empire collapsed.

So, Paul's point is that the 'wisdom of the greeks' was foolish and that these nine values based on love and service were subversive and effective.

1 Corinthians 1

²² Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, ²³ but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling-block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

Resources

Listen to:

Read through:
Galatians 5
Corinthians 1:22-25
Mark 10:45
1 John 4

Watch:

In Mark 10:45, Jesus said 'The son of Man has not come to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many'. It's his example we follow.

John writes about the importance of love.

1 John 4

God is love. Those who live in love live in God, and God lives in them.

Going back to the fruits of the Spirit, every time we embody them we demonstrate the kingdom. Every time we are gentle, kind, patient in the smallest of things, we plant another mustard seed of the kingdom.

Tom Wright said, "A new sort of power will be let loose upon the world, and it will be the power of self-giving love. This is the heart of the revolution that was launched on Good Friday. You cannot defeat the usual sort of power by the usual sort of means. If one force overcomes another, it is still "force" that wins. Rather, at the heart of the victory of God over all the powers of the world there lies self-giving love, which, in obedience to the ancient prophetic vocation, will give its life "as a ransom for many."

Empire is about power.

The kingdom is about love.

The point Paul and John make is that 'the power of love is greater than the love of power'.

A person can work for a church and have an empire mentality and a person can work for 'an empire' and have a kingdom mentality.

Some examples:

- Marcus Rashford – holiday hunger campaign. Using his influence as Manchester Utd for good.
- Refugee community resettlement – one family's life changed forever
- Winter shelter – serving the marginalized in the city
- Praying for someone upset on the train
- Holding an umbrella for someone

Henri Nouwen said:

"We live in a culture where our identity is based on how well we do, how much we do, how much we possess and what others say about us."

Mother Teresa said 'Never worry about numbers. Help one person at a time, and always start with the person nearest to you.'

Talk it through together

- Discuss the fruits of the Spirit, how have you found them to be alive in your life?
- How do you demonstrate the kingdom by the way you think and live?
- Inspired by the words of Mother Teresa, what one person could you help this week?